



KEY TAKEAWAYS

MELISSA DOMAN LLC

WIPN Digital Fireside Interview: Mental Health at Work: a Deeply Needed Deeper Dive

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Book: *Yes, You Can Talk About Mental Health At Work...Here's Why and How To Do It Really Well*

MEANINGS MATTERS

- **Mental Health:** our baseline social, emotional, and cognitive functioning. Everyone has mental health. It serves as the foundation of who we are, how we see ourselves and our environment, and how we relate to others.
- **Mental Illness:** a clinical behavioral health condition that impacts someone's thinking, behavior, emotional, or social functioning. There are over 300+ types of mental illness, ranging from mild to severe, episodic to chronic, and everything in between.
- **Stress:** a stressful stimulus that requires adjustment or response
- **Ambiguous grief:** sadness and yearning, anger and guilt, or a range of other emotions, can accompany the change or loss of a relationship
- **Trauma:** an intense emotional response to a shocking event
- **Burnout:** a state of total emotional & physical exhaustion from ongoing chronic stress
- **Learned helplessness:** when you become conditioned to believe that a bad situation is unchangeable or inescapable.

THE MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION & WORLD OF WORK HAVE CHANGED

- The pandemic has **highlighted:**
 - A **long-term need and necessity**, not a 'trend'. It's always been a workplace issue – the pandemic has highlighted the urgency and necessity of discussing it long-term. The next epidemic, sadly, will be a wave of mental illness, due to the prolonged trauma and stress everyone has experienced.
 - **How peoples' values have shifted:** the past 2.5 years have made many people re-evaluate what's most important to them, and many people feel these opinions strongly

- People are **working at even faster breakneck speeds** across industries. **It's tough to prioritize mental health at work**
- **The continued weight of it all:** we currently have the worst global stress levels on record, multiplying COVID-19 variants, continued political and social division, loss, grief, bereavement, and more
- **Change and uncertainty are dominant themes:**
 - **Why long-term ambiguity & uncertainty can take a toll on mental health:** Our brains like comfort, ease, and predictability. Change & uncertainty can be stressful, and our brains & bodies aren't big fans of that, because our 'primal brains' interpret this as a threat.
 - **How it shows up:** emotionally, physically, behaviorally, and professionally.
- **It's healthy and reasonable to display a full range of emotions:**
 - **A full range of emotions:** mental health and experiencing stressful events produces a whole range of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Steer clear of engaging in toxic positivity and trying to tell people 'everything will be ok' all the time in response to their stress.
 - There is a difference between offering hope and making someone feel like their negative feelings aren't welcome in a conversation.
 - **People need to come as they are:** don't encourage mental fitness, toxic positivity, or unhelpful platitudes as a 'solution' or 'fix' in response to emotional health struggles.
 - We are pre-programmed with a wide range of emotions for a reason – let people use them.
 - **We need to stop attaching 'mental health rules' to gender:**
 - **No more gender-based emotion shaming™:** experience is experience, and emotion is emotion, regardless of the gender someone identifies as. We know this, and attaching historical rules to how someone should display (or not display) emotional reactions to upsetting events is outdated, harmful, and we know better now.

CONVERSATIONAL BEST PRACTICES TO GET YOU STARTED

- **Individual effort matters:**
 - **Encourage others to manage their mental health too** – they can't make you responsible for it. Every chronologically aged adult is responsible to manage their own mental health
 - **Encourage the use of Emotional Intelligence:** self-awareness, self-management, relationship awareness, and social awareness.

- **Talking about your own mental health:**
 - **This is a skill set like any other:** develop the conversational literacy required for the language we all need to know how to speak
 - **Do your back-end prep ahead of time if needed:**
 - Am I nervous to talk about my mental health at work and why?
 - What do I want to share and why?
 - Who do I want to share this with?
 - What do I want them to do with this information?
 - What am I prepared to do after this conversation?
 - **Communicating how you feel and what you need**
 - Tell others how you feel and where you're at, and what you specifically need to feel supported.
 - Use 'I' statements, your 'why', and statement of needs. People won't know your needs, and you won't know theirs, unless you both ask.
 - Decide what you want to share and what people need to know (spare the unnecessary details)
 - **If someone checks in with you:**
 - That's great that they are trying to be supportive. Authentic care, with no hidden agenda, is a wonderful thing to receive
 - If it's at a time that doesn't work for you, schedule it for later
 - If it's coming from someone you don't trust or don't want to speak to, you don't have to have that conversation with them. No ghosting, explain why, constructively and in a mature way.
 - **If the conversation doesn't go as planned:**
 - Not all is lost! Seek to understand why the conversation may have shifted in a way you didn't expect and aim to course correct
 - Give the person the benefit of the doubt until they give you a reason not to – they may not understand, be uncomfortable with the topic, or a myriad of other reasons.
- **As a leader:**
 - **For your team:**
 - **Act it out:** role model & self-disclose. Remember that your team will often look to you for permission to discuss mental health at work - start the conversation

- **Language:** Incorporate and normalize the words mental health and stress into the fabric of work discussions
 - **You may not always be the best person to help them:** that's why additional resources, HR, EAP, and health insurance exist!
- **For you:**
 - **It's a 2-way street:** allow your team members to also support you! Learn to accept help and support from others (without guilt or shame)
 - **Put on your own oxygen mask** - show up for yourself so you can show up for others
- **Supporting Others:**
 - **Remember the purpose:** authentic conversations, emotional self-management, and empathy towards one another. Showing authentic care isn't intrusive. You can be a supportive empathic human within work boundaries.
 - No matter who you are supporting, remember that you can offer help, but they don't need to accept it. Supporting someone is about supporting them, and when they're ready. Not about fulfilling your desire to help them.
 - And, be supportive, but don't aim to fix or save. When you do that, you're doing that person a disservice by understanding the importance and value of managing their mental health and taking action to use resources when they need it.
 - Try to find a balance between compartmentalization vs. open playing field – being supportive within work boundaries.
 - **Additional guidance:**
 - Ask the type of support they want (just listening or solutioning)
 - Ask questions and seek to understand (don't give advice)
 - Don't judge, and normalize what they're feeling
 - Be present and don't let tech distract you
 - Respect their confidentiality and don't be a gossip
 - Be clear on next steps (if needed)